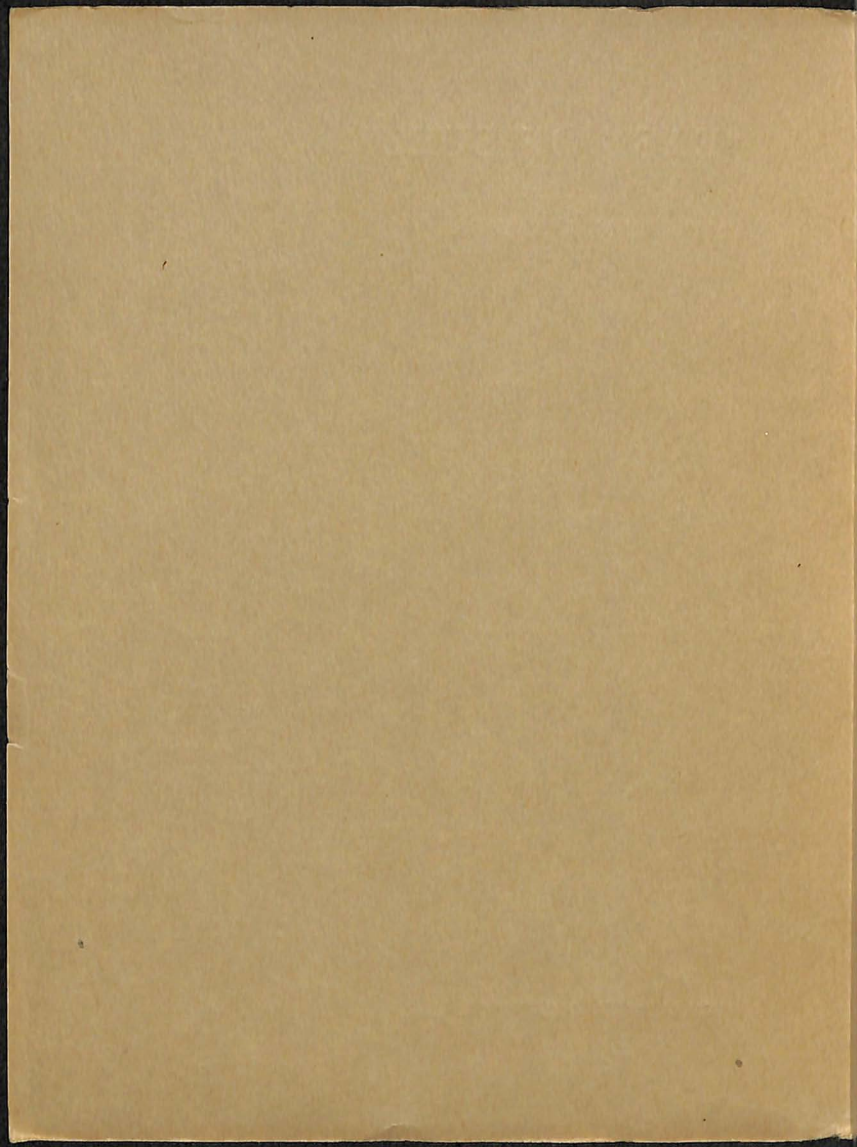


"EAST OF SUEZ"

BY HELEN M. A. TAYLOR

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“EAST OF SUEZ”

SKETCHES OF INDIA AND CEYLON

BY

HELEN M. A. TAYLOR

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT
NATIONAL BOARD
YOUNG WOMENS CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS
600 LEXINGTON AVENUE
NEW YORK
1918

Miss Taylor has traveled widely in the Orient, and spent two years in Association work in India and Ceylon.

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THE LADY OF THE CINNAMON GARDENS

BY HELEN M. A. TAYLOR

"No, I don't want to move to the country! I'd much rather stay in the city. It will be so lonely in the village and there'll be nothing to do."

"But you will soon have friends through the church. You will get acquainted quickly, with your father as the new pastor."

"Yes, but it takes time to really know people and they won't be like our good friends here. And then you know there is no Young Women's Christian Association, so there will be no place to meet other girls, no tennis club, no sewing lessons, no Bible class."

It was indeed a doleful little Singalese girl who was talking to her friend the American secretary. Sara was the only gloom in sight—all else was sunshine and laughter. Across the garden four girls were playing tennis, umpired by a benchful of companions. Another group was gathered around the tea table under the shade of an arbor of yellow alamander blossoms, and on the veranda of the bungalow others were reading. In and out among the girls, over hedges of blue plumbago and bushes of heliotrope, under purple banana buds, fluttered brilliant butterflies. Across the grass strutted crested hoopoes, and now and then a kingfisher darted from the lake. Yellow temple flowers and snowy ginger blossoms scented the air, and overtopping all else the palms caught the sun on their gleaming leaves.

“Yes,” said the secretary, “you will miss

the tennis club, but perhaps in your own garden there will be a place for a badminton court, and you know that's so much like tennis that no doubt you can find some girls in the church who will enjoy learning to play it."

"Perhaps"—it was a dubious consent. "And then I'll miss all the different kinds of girls one sees here in the city—the Tamils and the English, Americans and Burghers and sometimes even a Chinese. There will be only my own people in the village, only Singalese."

"That," answered the secretary, "is the first objection you have given which is insurmountable, yet the very fact that you know from your own experience that each nation has some special gift to give to the world is a reason for your going to your people to share with them your vision of world brotherhood."

"Yes," Sara consented, "it has meant

much to me to have met girls from other nations in the Association. And then you know our moving has another bright side, for we are not going to live in the north of Ceylon where there are only palmettos and sand. We're to live where there are cocoanuts. I'd not like to have to go up-country where they don't grow. It is said they will not thrive away from the sound of the surf. We have always had so many in our garden here in town. I wonder if you, a foreigner, love the cocoanuts as we do who have always lived under their rustling leaves? Look at them over there around the tennis court. See how the long leaves wave, hear how pleasantly they sing! But now I must go home. Here comes Morisano with the hackery. Please come to see us. It will not take an hour to the station and Morisano will meet you with the bullock." Off Sara drove in the hackery, the trim little carriage whose

brown paint and cushions just matched the sleek brown coat of the little trotting bullock. The secretary watched her smilingly wave her hand as Morisano turned the bullock down the lantana-hedged drive. "Another of our girls starting out on the glad exploration," she said to herself. "I believe she will try to minister her gift," and the secretary crossed the lawn to join the enthusiastic umpires and pour tea for some newcomers.

* * * * *

It was a few months later that a letter arrived from Sara. "Do come and tell us how to organize a branch of the Association. There are some girls in the church who want one. There is no one to lead it but perhaps with your help I could do something. Do you suppose such a thing would be possible? My mother says I have no ability to do it, but you know she has never had the training in the mission

school that I had, and never studied in your Bible class. The girls will come to our house for tea any day you can come out."

The very next week the already over-busy secretary made time to go to Sara's new village home. Certainly she had not moved beyond the cocoanuts. All the way as the train rolled along beside the blue sea, the cocoanuts waved above it. Morisano and the brown bullock were waiting at the station and throughout the long ride the cocoanut groves crowded inquisitively above garden walls. The hackery was not the trim brown one, which was too light for such roads as these, but a sturdy country bullock cart. It was devoid of springs and Morisano sat on the tongue of the wagon, the only place for the driver to sit, of course, for where else could he reach the tail of the bullock? You know you speed a bullock up by pulling his tail

or vigorously prodding him with a short goad. A bullock is never a fast animal and when you are eager to reach girls who want a Young Women's Christian Association, he is an exasperatingly slow snail!

Five girls were sitting sedately in the dim drawing room, as befitted a great occasion. Introductions over, the secretary suggested that they go into the garden. Why stay indoors when the birds and the flowers invited them out? Under a wide-spreading banyan they talked. Gradually the story came out—how Sara had met the girls in the town and how those in her father's church had heard her speak often of the Association of which she was a member in Colombo. Everything that a girl could want seemed in some way connected with it. They all began to wish that they could move to the city that they too might belong. That could not be, for their families were rooted

in the village with all their family connections. It would be like trying to transplant a thousand-rooted banyan tree, and everyone knows that not even the gods can transplant a banyan!

One of the things that Sara had learned in Colombo was that some people are able to achieve the impossible, and she knew that the secretary was one of those, so to her she had turned. Now the secretary was here with them under their banyan tree, telling them how they could be a part of this world movement.

In a few weeks all the girls in the church were enrolled as members. Before long they were busy with a Bible class, teaching in a mission Sunday school for Buddhist boys and arranging a Christmas treat for their own Sunday school.

Several months later came a note from Sara. "Do come and tell the women and girls of the village that one need not be a

Baptist to be a member of the Association."

At the station Sara met the secretary and found a sympathetic ear for her denominational worries. "It's just this way," she confided; "I'm a Baptist and we meet in the garden of another Baptist and the original members were all Baptists from father's church, so people think one must be a Baptist to be a member. I hope you are not one." She was not. While Morisano prodded the brown bullock and shouted "Mak! mak!" at him, the secretary jogged along beside Sara, marveling at the change that had come over her.

"Are you satisfied now in the country?" she asked.

The black eyes flashed happily. "Indeed, yes. You were right. I needed to share all I had learned in the Association Bible class. I am more contented here than in Colombo, for I have been able to

give something they need. My mother is so astonished because somehow I have found out how to do these things."

Even the farseeing secretary was surprised at the well-planned meeting that awaited her. The schoolroom was filled with women and girls and on the platform were all the ministers of the town. It was a world circle they took that afternoon through many countries, many creeds, many needs, many talents, but everywhere were girls like themselves to receive and to give. At the close of the meeting the ministers each and all came to the secretary and said: "We need a fully trained foreign secretary. There are ten thousand Christians in these villages. Can you send us one?"

Have you ever tried to explain to a group of Christians in the Orient the real reason why Christians at home are not sending more men and women and money

to the non-Christian lands? Then you know how that secretary felt.

The train was late that evening. The darkness had fallen swiftly as it does in the tropics. Just beyond the station a ribbon of white beach ran down to the sea and the pounding surf. The afterglow had faded from ocean and sky but on high the moon sailed, dressing sands and surf in cloth-of-silver. Between the sands and the moon, islands of cocoanut leaves floated, casting a black reflection on the white beach. While she walked beside the moonlit sea that connected Asia and America, the secretary wondered what could be done for the girls in this out-of-the-way Christian village in Ceylon. "Somewhere we must get a helper for Sara. It is too heavy a work for her to carry alone. Oh, if we could only find another Singalese woman who could be a leader!"

* * * * *

One morning the secretary sat at her desk planning how half a dozen might do the work of a score when Sara came in. Her face was aglow with enthusiasm. "I've had such an audacious idea—I had to come to town to talk to you about it. Perhaps you'll think it is as impossible as my mother does, but I don't think you will. I wrote that your talk had helped the village to see the broadness of the Association and several from other churches have joined the branch and we have one Buddhist girl. We are coming to our first birthday with something like a real associating of girls. It's about our annual meeting I've been thinking. Perhaps you don't know that our village is almost in the middle of the cinnamon gardens of Mr. De Silva. Everyone looks up to him as the great master. They know the real king-emperor is in London but many of the villagers think Mr. De Silva

is the richest and most powerful of men. Perhaps that is natural, since most of them depend on him for their living and they can't see such a close connection with the king-emperor! Now this is my audacious idea. Mrs. De Silva is on the committee of the city Association. Do you suppose she would consent to preside at our annual meeting?"

That was an idea! For several years this charming Singalese lady had faithfully attended committee meetings and had given bountifully of her silver rupees, but never had anyone been able to persuade her to undertake more public work. Her plea had always been, "I am only a Singalese lady and have never done anything of the kind." It would be a triumph if she would preside. "We can telephone now and ask her if she can see us. I'll go with you and you can ask her." "Oh, no," Sara gasped, "I'd be frightened to ask a

great lady like her to do anything. I can't. I'd not know what to say."

It was a palatial house they entered. Sara had never dreamed of having its massive iron gates swing open for her. But when the great lady received them in the drawing room, Sara found she was not in the least awe-inspiring. The introduction was scarcely over before Sara was saying how much her people needed her. It would mean so much to them all, not only to those who worked in the cinnamon gardens, if they knew that the great lady was interested in the Young Women's Christian Association and in the Singalese people. The need of her people had so filled Sara that she had quite forgotten herself as she made her plea. It was a much-surprised secretary who heard Mrs. De Silva say, "I have never been on a platform, I have never said a word in public, but if you think it would help—I'll do it."

Think of the very hardest rain you have ever seen in America. If you double or triple that you will have a fair sample of a rain in the tropics. There was that sort of a rain on the day of the annual meeting of the village branch. The English president of the city Association and the American secretary were invited to ride out with the Singalese committee member in her motor. As they splashed over the red roads the secretary thought she had never seen the ocean such a lovely gray or the jungle so full of budding life. Nothing could dampen her spirits, not even the lugubrious remark of the president: "I wonder if anyone will come to the meeting. A monsoon rain like this is usually considered equivalent to an announcement of a meeting postponed."

Suddenly the jungle ended. On both sides of the road, as far as eye could see, were low bushes of cinnamon. On and on

stretched the cinnamon gardens, to the very houses of the little town.

The largest room in the town was the schoolhouse. If you didn't know Ceylon, you'd think you were approaching a huge haymow, so close to the ground came the roof of palm thatch. Inside were as many women and girls as the room would hold. Various-aged brothers leaned over the wall, for a Singalese school in the country is built with the wall only three or four feet high and the thatched roof is upheld by cocoanut pillars to allow every possible breeze to blow through the room.

It was a representative audience. The majority were those whose ancestors had lived near by in the low-country. Their tight-fitting bodices cut with deep, round necks had tight sleeves, while the women who had come here to live from up-country had large, puffed sleeves. These wore their saris high on the right shoulder,

while the low-country girls used them for skirts only. Occasionally in the audience one saw a Hindu girl from South India. Her bodice was of red velvet and her sari held on the left shoulder. The only Buddhist member sat with the rest of the branch near the wheezy portable organ, in the corner where they vigorously led the singing.

No one would have thought the presiding officer was timid and self-conscious and ill at ease, as she announced the hymns and introduced the speakers, nor that this was her first adventure in public life. At the end was an item not on the program, a speech from the presiding officer. The whole meeting, the reports, all the eager faces, had so impressed Mrs. De Silva that she could not keep still. She had to put her new interest into words. She made herself so much one of the people that after the meeting they crowded

around her, they too forgetting that she was the great lady of the cinnamon gardens.

The low sun was gilding the under side of the cocoanut leaves when the people began to go and Sara went up to thank Mrs. De Silva for her kindness. "Oh, Miss Sara, it was you who were kind to me, to think of letting me come!"

Then she turned to the president and asked: "May I take as my own special work helping Miss Sara in this branch out here? To-day I have seen the need of my people. I want to help."

A PAIR OF EARRINGS

BY HELEN M. A. TAYLOR

Esther was a village girl in India.

In the short years of her childhood she played in the fields and under the trees as does any other girl in a small town. What matter if they were fields of tender yellow-green rice instead of waving corn, or if the trees were tall, sinuous cocoanuts instead of spreading maples? Under the thousand roots of the wide banyan tree Esther played with her toys, a gaudy doll of sun-baked mud or a shriveled little cocoanut. Sometimes she followed her brother when he rode the lumbering water-buffalo home from the slimy stream where it had been wallowing throughout the heat of the day. What fun it would be to try

to drive that ferocious animal, to perch atop the bony back, hold on to the curved horns and try to make him trot by digging one's brown heels into the gray ribs! But that was not girls' play.

Esther was not very old when her mother gave her her own little brass waterpot, to let her help carry the family supply. The village water did not come from a river or lake or well, but from a tank, an artificial storage basin in the center of the village. Generations ago it had been dug, and its sides faced with stone. Two flights of broad steps led down into the water, those at one end being for the men and at the other for the women.

All her life Esther's mother had taken her each morning to the tank, for there the village took its morning bath, and the women exchanged the gossip of the day and returned home with their jars of

water. Esther was a delighted little girl when she had learned to walk all the way to her house from the tank without spilling one drop from the shining pot balanced, village fashion, on her hip. There were months at a time, during the rains, when water was so plentiful that a few drops lost would not matter. Then there were months in the hot season when the villagers hoarded it greedily, knowing from bitter experience that no more could be had when the storage tank was exhausted. The village had sad memories of burning days and burning nights, when the parched people waited for the coming of the rains.

It was not until later that Esther learned why the bo trees in her village had no stone gods under them, why the house of worship was so plain and simple compared to the ugly, repulsive shrines of the neighboring villages. The wayside shrines

of the Hindus were a common sight; standing under a bo tree would be one or two smooth stones smeared with red, or a cobra crudely carved in stone. Often Esther had seen a man prostrate himself in the heat and dust of the road before these stones, and she had known that the lifeless stones could not satisfy his yearnings or calm his fears. She began to know what the difference was between the two religions when her mother told her stories of her ancestors in the far western land, and of a girl of her people who had become the famous queen Esther, and as this modern Esther grew up in her Jewish village in South India she saw more and more clearly the gulf between the religion of her people and the idolatrous Hinduism around her.

The days sped on, one day as much like another as one garland of marigolds is like another, until for Esther the great

day came. The mango fruit had ripened for twelve seasons since she was a baby, so by popular consent she was now grown up, and at last her mother said she was old enough for the gold earrings!

There were sovereigns enough to make them. Esther had watched that precious store of gold grow through the years,—now a big copper pice, now an anna piece of nickel, and sometimes, when the rice harvest had been unusually fine, a whole silver rupee had gone to swell the hoard. Several times she had seen her mother pull a handful of money from its hiding-place in a hole in the wall, and had helped her count out fifteen rupees' worth of copper, nickel and silver money. They had carried all this wealth, securely tied in one corner of her mother's sari, to the village money lender, and had received in exchange a shining yellow sovereign.

So now, out on the low veranda, shaded

by a dense banyan, sat the village goldsmith. Word had come to him to bring his tools, his bellows and furnace to make a pair of carved earrings. In the cool of the morning he arrived and the mother brought from their hiding-place the hoard of gold coins. They talked together about the design and as he arranged the tools for the work, she settled down comfortably, for of course even though he had made all the family jewelry for years, he must be watched. Who would think of handing gold to a smith and then not watching lest he substitute baser metal?

Shyly Esther looked from the doorway. What happiness when the first yellow disc was finished! Eagerly she picked it up and weighed it in her hand. How big it was! It almost filled her palm. Few of the village women had such large ones. Now she was glad for the very long time when they had been making the holes in

the lobes of her ears larger and larger, for one cannot wear such big discs unless there are wide holes to sink them in. Caressingly she toyed with it while she watched the goldsmith beat the other on to the mass of resin that was to hold it while he carved the intricate design. How skilfully the sharp tools cut the shining metal, how the sun flashed on the new-cut pattern!

At last, after many hours of careful work, the great gold discs were finished. The mother's years of thoughtful saving were rewarded when she saw her daughter's delight in her new treasures. And how lovely, too, was the fair brown face between the shining discs of gold that caught the sunshine. Her eyes glowed with pride!

The next morning perhaps it was not only a wish to help carry the water that made Esther eager to go to the village

tank. The brass waterpot on her hip shone brilliantly, her red sari was draped with even more grace than usual, yet she tried to look unconcerned when she walked past the neighbors' houses. She even stopped a minute on the top step of the tank to look up at some gray crows chattering on a palm leaf. She could not but create a sensation, for she had chosen the time when the tank was most popular. The bathing-place was crowded. Some women were in the water, others were on the steps filling their jars and exchanging the news. The arrival of the earrings was well staged, and the commotion created was all that any girl could desire. But was there not some excuse for her feelings, since no other woman in the village except her mother had such large gold ones, and not even those were so delicately carved? More than all else, however, was the consciousness that now she was a woman and

had something that was her very own possession.

While she was yet a little girl, the day had come when Esther found out that even as her village was different from the Hindu villages, so her father was different from the other men of the countryside. He was going to have her do an impossible thing, something no other girl there had ever done—she was to learn to read. As she studied, and the wide circle of the world's people became hers, little by little the desire grew in her to help her village. Perhaps it would be well to teach reading—but no, that would not help all the women, for some were too old and feeble to learn and some didn't want to learn. And then there were the tiny babies who needed help. She knew what was being done by western medicine and decided to become a physician.

In this way it happened that like many

another village girl in other lands, Esther went up to the great city to study. The journey in the train was strange. It went so much faster than a bullock cart. Through all the long miles she was full of anxiety lest her earrings be stolen from her. She had taken them out of her ears and in the yawning holes in the lobes had put coils of bamboo leaf. If you have only twists of a leaf in that big hole in your ear, your traveling companions will not know how fine are the gold discs that belong there. So she arrived safely in the city with these choicest possessions and went to the student home of the Young Women's Christian Association.

It was very different from her village, this wide-spreading city, and the hostel was very different from her home. There were twenty girls and she was the only Jewess. The others were Christians or various kinds of reform Hindus, and there

was even a Buddhist, so that she had to consider again the meaning of her Judaism. In the evening all the girls of the hostel met in the pleasant living room for prayers, and there Esther heard for the first time the fulfilment of the prophecies she had been familiar with in her Old Testament. The New Testament was opened to her. Here, then, was the Messiah!

It was a very happy year, with her new-found Christianity and her studies. She delighted in the life in the hostel with all the other girls, and she was not a little proud that her earrings were the finest of any there, although she tried not to be too conscious of them.

At last April came bringing the long vacation when she might journey back to her own people.

The village was glad to see her. The women gathered around to examine the

clothes she was wearing since her year in the city, but they shook their heads in perplexity and said to each other, "She's still wearing her earrings." The same thing happened the next year at the time of the long vacation, but this time the women said openly to Esther herself, "You are still wearing those earrings!"

The last long vacation came. The next time she came home it would be as a "licentiate of medicine," the degree conferred on her by the British Government. Day by day through the long burning months she went to the village tank with her mother, and there met the other women. "You say you are now a Christian," was their anxious comment. "Yet you still wear your earrings? And you are going to be given a title for your learning by the great English Raj?" "Yes," replied Esther. "You are the only woman who has ever gone away from the

village, the only woman in the entire countryside who has ever learned to read and write, yet you still have those big holes in the lobes of your ears, still wear those big rings! What, then, has your education done for you? Have we not heard that those with western learning do not make such holes in their ears?"

When college opened again in July, Esther began her senior year much troubled. How could she give up her lovely gold discs?—yet her people would not believe in her Christianity unless she did. Through the months the question was uppermost in her mind. It was a long, hard struggle. She had planned to go back to help her people and for them she had refused a good Government position. Must she give up the only possession that was her very own?

The rains came and went. One short vacation followed another, yet the ques-

tion was still unsettled. "Finals" drew near. Could she give them up? Could she keep them?

It was just before the conferring of the degrees. One of the secretaries was talking to Esther. "I suppose that as soon as you have your degree you go straight back to your village?" Something crystallized in Esther's mind. The long struggle was over. With shining eyes she looked up and said: "No, first I am going to the hospital to have the holes in my ears sewed up. I cannot take to the women of my village the Christianity which they need more than the medicine, if I go on wearing my earrings. But how gladly I give them up!"

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